

## **“Before and After”**

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The other morning, Facebook shared a “memory” with me. It was a picture I had posted from years ago when I was a student teacher at North Knox High School in southern Indiana. As a part of my teaching experience, I was asked to help coach the varsity baseball team. So I was included in the team picture. I looked at the picture I had shared of this young, dark haired,

full beard, tinted glasses wearing, coach dressed in the team uniform, and I wondered what had become of him?

So much about me has changed over the past 40 years. I hardly recognize my old self. Do you ever look back at a picture and hardly recognize your younger self?

Kelly O'Brien, in an article about people sharing before and after pictures of themselves on social media, says: "We take photos as a return ticket to a moment otherwise gone." ([women.com](https://www.women.com) 2018)

One of the things that can help us through our grief when a loved one dies, is putting together picture boards. I love looking at the photos so much more than seeing the body of a deceased person. Not that we shouldn't view the body of our loved one. Doing so helps with closure, but the pictures bring to life the person we knew and loved.

Without the benefit of a camera to take pictures of or selfies with their friend, Jesus, all the two disciples have are the memories in their hearts and minds of Jesus.

Jesus is dead, or at least was a few days ago. However, that morning some women went to the tomb, and excitedly returned telling what the men thought to be an "idle tale" about an empty tomb, and messengers from God saying Jesus had risen. Morning had faded into evening. Nighttime was upon them as these two guys made their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

As they are walking, a stranger joins them. It is interesting to note that "in Greek, the word for stranger is paroikos. Oikos means 'house,' so literally, par-oikos means "outside the house." This is the same word that is used for someone who lives in a country without citizenship," as in an "immigrant," or a "foreigner."

Perhaps their minds were elsewhere, thinking about all that had happened and the strange news they had heard that morning, combined with the fading light, may have contributed to the fact that they did not recognize Jesus. Or was it because the Jesus they knew was dead and the One walking with them had changed?

In talking about before and after pictures, Kelly O'Brien says: "The hardest things in life are transitioning from one version of yourself to another". ([women.com](https://www.women.com) - 2018)

Maybe the same could be said of transitioning from one version you have a person before and after that person went through a major life changing event, say, like a death and resurrection.

There is the Jesus of history, the one who was a living, breathing, flesh and bone, human being. The one who artists have attempted to capture in

paintings. And then there is the post-resurrection One, who in rising to new life, is now the Universal Christ, who looks nothing like the old physical body. Christ is now the Body who transcends all time and space. Christ is the One who is in all, through all, and forever among all.

Someone once said, "Time is divided into two parts: before and after."

Before death, the physical body of Jesus looked one way. And that is the picture these two disciples had of him. But with resurrection, the body had changed from the historical one to the resurrected, cosmic Christ. They were looking for the pre-resurrection Jesus, the physical one they knew and loved. They had yet to encounter the Resurrected One. Which may explain why as they listened to this stranger call them out on their limited understanding, they still could not see who was in their presence.

They were still seeing the "before" picture of Jesus and not the "after" image of the Christ.

That all changes of course as they invite the stranger to be a guest in their home (for evening is coming and the day is almost over). As they share a meal, Luke says, "he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them" and then their eyes were open and they recognized him. But only for a moment, as Christ vanishes.

This amazing experience is too good to keep to themselves, so even though it is in night, and their way back to the others is challenging, even risky at night, they have to tell others. And when they do so, it is in the gathered community they share their experience. It is also there that they find the others who have come together have also had their own encounters with the Risen Christ.

Friends, it is in our communing with one another, in the sharing and receiving of the bread, that our eyes are open to the Christ in our presence.

A few Easters ago, the Christ appeared in our midst. We were celebrating communion. As I was breaking the bread and Cheryl Stitz was offering the Cup, a young child named Charlie, came forward, took the other half of the bread off the communion table, and began to help me in sharing it with you. In that moment, the Risen Christ appeared! Did you see him too?

While the pandemic closed our buildings for worship, the living, risen presence of Christ is been visible out in the community. I saw the risen Christ handing out food through the school kitchen staff and volunteers with other programs like Meals-on-Wheels. Christ was visible even masked up, wearing gloves, and but still their sharing food. Did you see?

If we continue to look for the "before-the-pandemic" Jesus we remember, we will miss the "after-the-pandemic" Christ who is living out in the world and no longer needs to be defined simply by walls.

Kayla McClurg says: “Meeting Jesus along the way changes our story. Something dead in us, in our communities, in our families, in our churches - is coming alive. The holy is here. Whether we notice or not, we are meeting Jesus on the road (out in the world). We are eating resurrection, swallowing it down, letting it become us. We are being remade....” (Inward/Outward)

I look back on that picture of the young me as a student teacher, but that person is in the past. I don't want to just tell you about who I was before. I want to share with you who I am after all these years, and how I have encountered the Risen Christ along the way.

We, as the Church, would do well to do the same. So were have you encountered the Christ recently?

Amen